

[This Vincenzo who is my Grandfather]

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THIS VINCENZO WHO IS MY GRAN'FATHER MEN Against Granite

"Parlatanto?" The old man chuckled over the name. He smacked his lips. "No, Parlatanto is not my real name. I am born Pip Alberto Vittorio Frangini. Pio for the pope we have at that time, Alberto for the king, an' Vittorio for his son who is born the same day I am, on November 11. Today Vittorio is king an' emperor, an' me — hah, I got me two names, too, no? I think if Mussolini was show' his famous face at that time I would have Benito push' in my name somewhere."

The weathered farmhouse where Parlatanto lived with his son was one continuous piece — house, woodshed, and barn. It was early November; the countryside was white with a thin sprinkling of snow. The old man made apologies for the curtainless windows, the roll of rugs in the corner, and the furniture that was crowded to one end of the room.

"You see, next week we move to Quincy, an' already we begin to pack things. It will be my first time in Massachusetts; I am excite' just like my gran' children. Here, sit here, please. You know, just so soon you call me Mister Parlatanto I guess right off quick: hah, here is someone come to hear my stories. It make me glad. Why else they call me Parlatanto except that I like to talk much an' tell my stories? That's what the name mean — talk-a-lot. Even in English that is hard to speak I still like to talk.

"I get the name Parlatanto from my father, an' him he get it from Vincenzo who is his father. This Vincenzo is 2 the first to be call' that. He have a great many experience, that one, an' he has pass' the stories down from one to another. I am here in America only six year now. When I get here I am a little bit surprise' but very proud that the stories have beat me across the ocean by 20 year. That is when my son come over here. I come to

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Barre an' I find his children already know the stories almost good like I do. But just the same they say, '[Nonno?],' never they call me gran' papa, pah, I do not like that! - 'Nonno,' they say, 'tell us about the time Vincenzo he is scare' almost to death—' An' they listen to the stories like they never hear them before.”

Old Parlatanto sat in his chair as straight as his wiry, stooped shoulders would allow. His watery eyes narrowed and widened expressively, and his wide mouth wriggled, pouted, or curled according to his mood.

“I am satisfy' in the ol' country, but there I am alone, so when my boy write six year ago an' ask me to come over I say to myself: listen, you ol' fool Parlatanto, here is a chance to see a new country. You talk a lot an' nothing have you see. Go over there, you fool, go on over an' see something. That's what I say to myself, an' so good a talker I am even to myself that in two month I am over here across the ocean. My son, he meet me In New York an' we come straight to Barre where he is work' in the stone shed. The first thing I see in Barre like my country is the bocci game they have in back of the house where my son live. Just like they do in Italy, they play it. It make me feel 3 good. The second thing is that big granite statue in the park. For quits a few minute' I think it is Mussolini, so big he is, head an' shoulder like a bull, an' all muscle, an' naked like Mussolini like always to be in statues. I say to myself: Hah, these American must believe Mussolini is the pretty great man. In Italy you can expect to see his statue in every corner, but here across the ocean you expect it not at all. I tell my boy that, an' he laugh almost to die. He tell me it is not a statue of Mussolini, it is a memorial to the young people of America.

“So soon I get in Barre I begin to study English with my gran' children from the books they take home from school. I guess I learn only a little. In the ol' country I use' to teach school in our town, but Mussolini has decide that young blood should do that now. All finish' us ol' teachers are. Now they get people who are train' to teach the gymnastic', an' to drill. They got to whisper ' credo, credo ' to Mussolini before they can teach. He has got fine ideas,

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this Mussolini, he want to see his country right at the top, so if he make one, two, or three even good size' mistake, we got to forget them, no?

"I live in Barre two year an' then my boy get a better job in the stone shed here in Northfield. Here it is a chance to live out on a farm almost like in the ol' country, so me all move out here—him, his wife, the four children, an' me. Me an' the daughter-in-law, we care for the farm. No extra money we make, but extra things to eat we get from the garden. 4 "Now I tell you about my little town in the ol' country. Near Locana it is, high up on bad an' dangerous ground. Above are more mountain'; Below are rock an' a narrow, crooked river. Every spring that river she will swell an' get mad, an' run like crazy over the bank. Many, many time she has spill' even to the grist mill where all the townpeople bring their grain to be ground to flour. Every spring some of that flour is spoil' by the river water. A fine church we got in our town, the church to Santa Maria Maddalena, an' right outside in the square is her statue. She is kneel' with her long hair in her hand to dry the feet of God. The people are tired to have flour spoil' every spring, so one day they buy a fine picture of the Santa. They nail it over the door of the grist mill an' they ask her please to keep away the crazy water. It cost money, that picture. Everybody in ask' to give a little money. My gran' father, Vincenzo is his name, is 16 year ol' then—one day him an' two other boys decide to fish to earn money, money for the Santa. All day they fish, fine trout they catch in that river - I have fish there many time myself - an' then they take them to the next town to sell.

"About 75 cents each they get, then instead of take' the money home for the Santa they go to a cantina that is like a beer garden here, an' they drink wine. It is dark when they start for home. The pocket' are empty, the bellie' are full of wine, the brain' are full of fun, an' the heart' they have no regret that they have cheat' the Santa.

"Pretty soon they are halfway between the two towns 5 on a lonesome spot where there in no house. All they hear is the wind like crying in the new chestnut leaves, an' the mad water that is roar' an' pound' hard on the rock below*. Vincenzo already he is win the name

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Parlatanto because his tongue is go' all the time for good or bad. [Vincenzo], he begin to make joke. 'Ha, what is that noise!' An' 'you see what I see behind that tree? A big black bear. Maybe she is smell the fish on our clothes', an' she want to make a meal—'

"They laugh loud, an' when the rock throw back the voice to them they laugh louder an' louder. Another boy start, 'Listen to that water, before long it will be over the road. We will have to swim home. Then for sure the fish smell will be gone from our clothes.' An' so they joke, an' try to scare each other.

"Now they are near the cemetery of the church of Santa Maria Maddalena, an they hear heavy step' behind them. But so drunk they are with wine an' joke that brave Vincenzo point' to the gravestones an' say' [?] Ha, the dead ones stamp in their graves to get out and make company with us. They know good [paesani?], those dead ones!

"But all the time those footstep' are come' closer. At last Vincenzo, he turn' around. He stop still an' he whisper in a truly scare' voice, ' Santa Maria ! That man behind us, he is a giant!" The boys all look, an' there is really a man, about 10 yards behind. Tall enough he is to make four men. So tall he does not look human, the boys think. Right away quick two boys begin to run. But Vincenzo 6 - that one has got a brain wheel that turns fast - Vincenzo, he seen that so long are the man's legs that he can catch them easy. This Vincenzo is a good one for religion an' church, all his family is — he say to his friends, 'This man is too big to be one of us, there is the devil in him sure. If we run he will be on us in a minute. Let us go right here to the church of the Santa, here on consecrate' ground he cannot hurt us.'

"Together they run behind the statue, they shiver there on their knees, they peek around the statue, an' they see the big man stop still in the road. He make one scream like a hundred devil', an' he step down that steep river bank. The boys can hear the rock get loose under him an' roll. Vincenzo say, 'His bones must be all broke!, he must be dead for sure, no one can get down those rock alive. Let us got along fast now.'

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"Fear has soak' up all the wine in them. Now they hurry along the road very serious an' scare'. They pass the grist mill that has the holy picture over the door, they come to the stone bridge at the foot of the hill, an' they are happy to know that they have only a mile to climb before they are home. Then all together at once they see the big man again. This time so scare' they are that their feet are stuck to the ground an' they cannot move, for the great man is lay' right in front of them, across the path they must go. His big head is rest' in a great thorn bush, his body is across the path, an' his legs are up on the stone wall that is three feet high, an' from his knees down 7 his legs are dangle' over the river. You can see what a big man he was!

"At last Vincenzo can make words with his stiff tongue, he say, ' Dio, this time we are finish for sure. What can we do, amici?' The big man is already make' movement like to get up. Now the boys grab each other by the arm an' they tremble, an' just then they hear a voice come down from the sky. They look up. They see nothing. Just a piece of new moon is there. But just the same the voice is from the sky, an' it say to them: [Pregate al buon' Dio?] [Chs vedere il arte Mio?] [Di bonta e di miserioordia?]

"That voice is from heaven!' Vincenzo cry. 'The Dio is will' to help us. Yes, yes, Dio, me will take your advice!' Quick the three fall on their knees. They make so many promises to the Dio that afterwards they do not keep them because they cannot remember them. They cry the Ave Maria, the Pater Noster, the DeProfundis, an' most of all they just beg ' libera me, Domine ; libera me, Dimine. '

"All the time they are make' prayers that man is make' awful groans. An' after they say ' Libera me, Domine ' about twenty times, the man begin to got up slow, slow, until he is sit on the stone wall, then down he dive into the river. They hear the awful crash like thunder, an' the rock an' water where he fall in all fire like the inferno. The boys see him no more, they get home safe. The next week they all work hard so that they can give the Santa double the 75 cents 8 they spend that night for wine."

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A twinkle danced in Old Parlatanto's watery eyes. "You know," he said after a long silence, "there is something in that story that story that make me believe maybe it is a little true. You remember I tell you that those boys are on their knees an' they pray to God in Latin — in Latin because they are teach' to pray that way, an' maybe they only half know what they say. Hah, an' there is God, smart enough to speak to them in Italian so they will be sure to understan' Him!

"Oh, this gran' father has many experience that we hand down one to another. I should tell you that after Vincenzo have this experience with the big man, he is turn' so religious almost he to a priest. He serve Mass all the time even when he is an ol' man. He read the prayer when people die, he can say any litany without the help of a prayerbook. Truly he in a very religious one.

"Maybe you think this Vincenzo has only the holy experience. Let me tell you, when he is only 15 already he is good man-size—big, strong, brave. Over there in Looana, Cirisoli, an' Montifli, they say it is Vincenzo who teach them many way to make cheese from one pail of milk. The story is like this : one day, Vincenzo is only 12 year ol' then, he get mad at his people an' he run away from home. He run high up, up in the mountain, so high no one around there never goes. Two night he sleep in trees, because he is afraid of wild animals, an' he live on grass an' berries. By the time he would like to go home but he is lost. Then he see 'way up on a high peak something that look like smoke. 9 So good a sight it is, like of home, that right away quick his strength rush' back to him, an' he climb an' crawl up the rockside. At the top he see that the smoke is come' from a cave up 6 feet in the rock. There are step' that go up to the cave. Vincenzo he climb the step', then he get down an his belly an' drag himself in the cave, for it is very low. He is in a dark narrow passage, but ahead of him he see a bigger space, where a fire is burn', an' over it is an iron pot that boil good an' hot, an' smell so good. An' then he see something move by the fire, an' it is the smallest man Vincenzo he has ever see. Small like a 6 year ol' boy, but ol', an' with a wrinkle' face an' gray hair an' moustache, an' he has long, fat goiter. So long it is that it is

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toss' over the shoulder. An' so little a man he is that Vincenzo is not much scare". He ask him please if he will give him something to eat, so hungry he is.

"The little man answer him in words that sound a little like Italian, just enough Italian so Vincenzo can understan'. He tell Vincenzo he is the last one of eight brothers who have always live' here in the cave. For five year' now he has been alone. He say his brothers were small like him, with goiters, an' his mother, too. His father, he never remember him. They are all dead now but him.

"Some of that story is lost," Old Parlatanto said regretfully. "I never know if the little man is glad to see Vincenzo or not. But anyway, he tell Vincenzo that mostly he live on goat milk an' cheese. An' then he tell him how to make many kind of cheese so no part of the milk will be 10 waste'.

"First he tell him how to make it like the cottage cheese we have here. Then he tell him a second way. You take the whey that is left from the first cheese an' in it you put a little piece of mountain root that is sour like vinegar. After this is boil' you strain it an' you have a soft, creamy cheese that the little man call' vercol. To make the third cheese you take the yellow water that is left an' you boil an' boil it all night. In the morning you got a brown cheese so delicate it melt on your tongue. This the little man call' [srass?]. You notice those two name. " Vercol an' srass, they begin to be Italian they end up in Swiss.

"The little man, he feed Vincenzo an' then he take him halfway down the mountain. When the boy is reach home nobody want' to believe his story. But one day he take some milk an' he make' those last two kind of cheese that no one there has ever eat' before. Then, yes, they believe him. Five or six men, they even go up the mountain to find the little man. They see the cave, the ashes of the fire, the step' dug in the stone, an' the cooking pot, but the little man they do not see. Maybe he is go off somewhere to die. Then some of the smart men of the town they begin to talk an' say that many year' ago there are quite a few

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of these little men in the mountain, an' they have those goiter because they can get no iodine there."

Old Parlatanto was tired. "So much I talk today my throat in sore. But I don't care. I can hardly wait to 11 get to Quincy, where I will fine new friends who have not yet heard the experience of this Vincenzo who is my gran' father."